

Measure Would Extend National Guard Operation at Southern Border

WASHINGTON - The presence of 3,000 National Guard troops at the U.S.-Mexico border would continue until they are replaced by newly-hired Border Patrol agents under a measure introduced by U.S. Rep. Harry E. Mitchell today .

Mitchell offered the proposal to extend Operation Jump Start as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act, which is expected to be considered by the House this week. Mitchell's amendment must be cleared by the House Rules Committee before consideration by the full House.

"It's pretty clear to those of us who monitor the border that removing the National Guard prematurely will only make matters worse," said Mitchell. "My colleagues on both sides of the aisle have urged President Bush and Secretary Chertoff to extend Operation Jump Start, but those requests have fallen on deaf ears. We have no choice but to pursue other action."

On May 8, Mitchell and U.S. Reps. Jeff Flake, Trent Franks, Gabrielle Giffords, Rick Renzi and John Shadegg wrote President Bush with a request for him to extend the National Guard presence.

"We believe we need more resources at the border, not less, and respectfully request that you maintain Operation Jump Start along our southern border," they wrote.

Mitchell previously urged President Bush to maintain the National Guard's border presence last summer.

"I believe this is the wrong time to begin such a drawdown, and I urge you to reconsider," Mitchell wrote on August 9, 2007.

He also wrote President Bush on February 28, after the General Accounting Office revealed problems with the virtual fence along the U.S.-Mexico border.

"Knowing that we are facing a delay in virtual border protection, I believe it is even more critical that we keep as much human border protection as possible, and I want to urge you again to stop the drawdown of National Guard troops along the border," Mitchell wrote in February.

There is growing support to continue Operation Jump Start. On April 22, Governors Janet Napolitano of Arizona, Bill Richardson of New Mexico and Arnold Schwarzenegger of California asked Congressional leaders to extend and fully fund the operation. Napolitano had previously written to Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff asking him to continue the operation.